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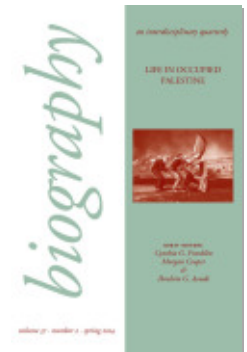
From the West Bank: Letters and Acts of Resistance

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FROM THE WEST BANK: LETTERS AND ACTS OF RESISTANCE

YASSMINE SALEH HAMAYEL AND ISLAH JAD

TRAJECTORIES

The editors of the special issue of *Biography* approached me to reflect on my mother's "Ramallah Letters," which chronicle the days of the Ramallah invasion in the Spring of 2002. I did not read all the letters until recently, for this writing project. I knew that my mother, Islah Jad, wrote them, but part of the reason I had not read them was because I had lived that period; I was there when the Second Intifada happened. I now realize there is a difference between writing about the daily events during the West Bank invasion and living them. These letters, and my reflections on them here, are a way to claim and to bear witness to a history we have lived through.

Almost two years before, in September 2000, the Camp David II summit between Chairman Arafat and Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak broke down, after it had started in July of that year in a US brokered effort under President Bill Clinton. The breakdown of the negotiations over the status of Jerusalem, the right of return for Palestinian refugees, and other issues led Barak to resign from government. And prior to the Israeli elections in 2001, which brought Ariel Sharon as the head of an extreme right-wing government to power, Sharon decided to make a provocative visit to the Aqsa mosque, under heavy protection from the Israeli Occupation Forces (IOF). His brazen visit on September 28, 2000 heralded the start of the Second Intifada, later called the Aqsa Intifada. Palestinian youth and those who were protecting the Aqsa responded in anger to such blatant disrespect and sacrilege with the only weapon they had—stones. And Israeli armed soldiers were ready and waiting for this predictable and provoked response to Sharon's act of desecration.

The rise to power of Sharon, known for his war crimes—most famously the Sabra and Shatila massacres against Palestinian and Lebanese people in 1982 in Lebanon—did not bode well for Palestinians participating in the Intifada. Upon assuming leadership, Sharon vowed to end the Intifada in 100 days. This meant using all the necessary force and prowess that the Israeli army could muster against the stone-throwing youth. Unlike the First Intifada, which consisted of widespread popular acts of civil disobedience, the Second Intifada quickly escalated to individual and faction-based military actions ranging from shooting to bombings of Israeli military sites and settlements, and bombings of Israeli restaurants and shops, too.

It is necessary briefly to contextualize the eruption of the Second Intifada. It broke out to protest the Oslo Agreement's unequal negotiations and the absence of a Palestinian vision to liberate the people from the occupation. By September 2000, Oslo entrapped the Palestinians in an endless cycle of land theft to build Jewish settlements on Palestinian land. The West Bank area totals 3,500 square km. At the time of the Second Intifada 170,000 settlers lived in 174 settlements amongst 450 Palestinian villages and cities.¹ The Gaza Strip had eighteen settlements, housing more than 3,000 settlers. In fact, at the beginning of 2000, Ehud Barak's government had begun constructing 1,943 settlement housing units (*Armed Turn* 111–12). The Israeli occupation's policy throughout the years of the occupation concentrated on isolating the Arab Palestinian areas from each other into separate entities encircled by Jewish-settler-only by-pass roads, settlements construction, aggressive home demolition policies, and refusal to grant Palestinians permits to build or use natural resources. All this led to a stark demographic imbalance in Jerusalem in particular and in the West Bank in general to pressure the Palestinian leadership into signing political agreements that serve the occupation's goals, i.e., keeping as much land as possible in the occupied territories under Israeli security pretexts, which essentially means that they refused to get out of Palestinians' lands to maintain the security of the Jewish settlements in their midst.

Even prior to the election of Sharon, Barak had vowed to end the Second Intifada as soon as it had started. True to his promise, the Israeli government resorted to intentionally killing the Palestinian stone-throwing youth at checkpoints (Azmi Bishara qtd. in *Palestinian Cause Seminar*). Palestinian youth protested at the checkpoints placed at the entrances of Palestinian cities because of the many by-pass roads that the IOF built to allow minimum interaction with the Jewish settlers and soldiers. Unlike the First Intifada, when there was direct contact and confrontation between Palestinians and soldiers, the geographical disconnection among the Palestinian cities made it impossible to have the same type of protests and civil disobedience tactics as in the

past. The Israeli army therefore resorted to using deadly armed force against the protesters, including the stationing of snipers atop buildings to shoot at youths within 100–150 meters (Palestinian Cause Seminar).

The IOF also escalated the policy of house demolitions. Between September 28, 2000 and August 15, 2003, the IOF destroyed 1,564 houses every month. Since the start of the Intifada, the IOF destroyed 4,046 private homes throughout the West Bank and Gaza. They also caused major damage to more than 548 public and private buildings, and destroyed the majority of the Palestinian Authority headquarters (Palestinian Society). Between the start of the Second Intifada and the invasion of the West Bank then, the political situation had radically deteriorated. As a result, security forces, political activists, and factions across the political spectrum engaged in various military actions (shootings at Jewish settlements and checkpoints, suicide bombings) against the Israeli army, against the settlements, and sometimes against civilians. Sharon's government decided to "discipline and punish" the Palestinians by invading the areas under the control of the Palestinian Authority.

It is this period that my mother's letters chronicle. I had not read the letters not only because I knew this history, but also because I had lost the letters: my mother had put me on her email listserv using my yahoo email account—an account that was hacked into years back, and then forever gone. My mother had stayed up late through the night to write the letters, when everyone including me was fast asleep. I don't remember all the events she describes in her letters, partly because at the time, I was too caught up in thinking of how to get through the last year of high school exams—the Tawjihi—which were to determine my academic future. Back then, I did not want to read about the events in those letters because I wanted to escape them. At the same time, reading the letters twelve years later opened up my eyes to how little I knew about the invasion days. These letters document crucial events in the struggle to end the occupation. And for Palestinians, this is of urgent importance, especially because aside from the dispossession and the robbing of our homeland, the 1948 Nakba was an attempt to rob us of our narrative that bears witness to our existence.

My family background is rich and dynamic. My mother is Egyptian but has lived in Palestine since the late 1970s, shortly after her marriage to my father, Saleh, who comes from Al-Bireh, the twin city of Ramallah. She was a political activist with him in Egypt during the late Nasser period and later during Sadat's regime. She is a Nasserite (believing in Nasser's Arab form of Socialism and Arab Nationalism). Having come from a working-class family with nine brothers and sisters, my mother personally benefited from Gamal Abdel Nasser's brand of Arab socialism. Born a year before Nasser came to power on July 23, 1952, after the revolution, my mother was able to get a free public

school and university education that would not have been available if Nasser had not come to power. For her and her generation, despite his authoritarianism, Nasser provided hope and a dream of something bigger than themselves. She especially believed in his interest in the Palestinian cause, particularly because he suffered the personal humiliation of the 1948 Nakba when he was in the Egyptian army that fought in Palestine during King Farouk's time. Being a Nasserite also meant believing in the idea that all Arabs are united in language, history, anti-imperialism, and the quest to liberate Palestine. Nasser's brand of Arab Nationalism gave the hope that by standing up to imperialism and colonialism, glories of the Arab past would return. The death of Nasser in 1970 and Sadat's coming to power led my parents to move to Palestine in 1978, especially after my father spent some time in Sadat's prisons and was banned from entering Egypt for more than twenty years.

In later years, with the advent of the First Intifada and in the early 1990s, my mother was one of the forerunners in the Palestinian women's movement. She helped create the women's coalition, "Women's Affairs Technical Committee" (WATC). She also played a leading role in founding the Women's Studies Institute at BirZeit University.

When the opportunity arose to work on the Ramallah Letters, I shared my excitement with some of my colleagues whom I met when engaging in political activism shortly after the start of the Tunisian revolution that ousted Ben Ali. Some of them reacted with sarcasm, and dismissed the idea of publishing and writing about the invasion of the West Bank and the Al-Aqsa Intifada. They were apprehensive about directing the letters to a non-Palestinian "Western" audience. They were concerned that this writing project would be an egotistical, proprietary account removed from the socio-economic and political colonial contexts of the Palestine cause.

But their concerns actually made me more interested in becoming a part of this initiative to broadcast the Palestinians' voices internationally, especially after carefully re-reading the letters. I was amazed at the resurfacing of many memories of the Intifada that I had forgotten about, and I remain impressed with my mother's keen ability to write in intricate details about our personal life, and capture in ways that are not ego-driven or individualistic the deaths and arrests of ordinary people we got to know or heard about in the news.

On 28 September 2000, when Ariel Sharon brazenly entered the Aqsa mosque, which resulted in clashes between the armed Israeli soldiers and Palestinians who only had stones to throw, I was in my room studying for the Tawjihi, which was scheduled for early June. I remember jokingly saying to one of my classmates that this eruption would only last a week, as it did back in the 1990s, and then go unnoticed. The surprise, however, and the shock was how greatly the Intifada escalated. Throughout its early days, young men

mostly went to the clash points at the entrance of Al-Bireh to throw stones at the soldiers, who responded by firing live and dum dum shots. So I focused on successfully finishing my exams. At the all-girls Saint Joseph High School, where the students tried to find any way to evade the classrooms and lectures, we got more excited about joining demonstrations and protests that boys from the nearby schools participated in by storming out of the school yards into the city. Unlucky in convincing our teachers and headmistresses that we should join the protests, we ended up doing a couple of protests inside the school walls, usually on the lunch break. Because my English was better than most of my classmates', I came up with slogans that we wrote on pieces of paper to raise in our school protest, such as "Get rested o Martyr, We shall continue the struggle." The truth however is that as high school girls, our participation in the Intifada was almost entirely symbolic; every November 15 on the commemoration of Palestine's Independence Day (declared so by Arafat in 1988), the school administration played some nationalistic songs about Palestinian resistance and steadfastness in an all-school celebration day.

All in all, during the first year of the Intifada, I remember studying very hard to get good grades, while most of my schoolmates took advantage of the shootings, bombings, and shelling sounds by not doing any studying and coming to class unprepared. I thought to myself that I had to find the strength to do something well. My mother particularly encouraged me to focus on studying to forget the sounds of shelling all around us. The booming sounds of F-16 planes, tanks, and M-16s echoed interchangeably every night and day. The hits felt like earthquakes. The severity of the vibrations and the booming meant that the tanks were close to the house. When the hit was especially close, we'd all gather, bonding our bodies to the floor, to shelter ourselves. My father had gone through enough wars throughout his life to instruct us on the best sheltering methods. Petrified, my siblings and I "laughed" at my father for suggesting we hide on the floors, since we thought our houses would crumble on our heads from any tank or M-16 strike. But he insisted, angrily, that we listen to him because hiding on the floor and away from windows was the best thing available to us. We also used to ask him to decipher for us the types of planes that were shooting at different building targets based on the sounds of the planes and the explosions.

After passing the matriculation exams successfully in school, and later, the public general exam held across the Palestinian territories, the only thing that changed to mark the Intifada was that we didn't celebrate graduation with a prom out of respect for the dead, injured, and detained. To this day, my dress, specifically tailored for a prom, which I had asked my designer aunt to make, is still packaged in cling-wrap, never worn.

My family background made up for the lack of political engagement in my school and among my classmates. My grandfather was deported by the Israel Occupation Forces, and lived in exile for twenty years. He was the mayor of Al-Bireh in the 1970s, and returned with my grandmother shortly after Oslo was signed in 1994. And my father and two of my uncles went to prison in the 1980s, shortly before and during the First Intifada. And one of my uncles, whom my brother is named after, was martyred in Lebanon in 1973 resisting Israeli occupation. So my family was very political, and we had political discussions whenever we got together. I inherited my political leanings, so to speak. I never, however, felt the need to join a political party. I was content with the political upbringing I had in my home, from my father, mother, uncles, and grandfather.

After high school, I enrolled at Birzeit University. My first year I was unsure of my major, and out of the whole year, I probably spent forty-five actual days in the university studying, due to the days of closures and the checkpoint blockades we encountered on the way from Ramallah to the university. We sometimes got lucky walking up the mountainous area to cross to the other side of the checkpoint or were let through by the IOF, but regardless, the university was closed for most of the year. I spent the year sleeping in and eating. My mom became alarmed at my downhill trajectory from being at the top of my class in high school to not caring about my studies at all. I wanted to leave Palestine, to run away from the routine life of being in the house and doing the house chores, and to escape the days of closures and curfews. Curfews and closures meant that all of us, my siblings, mother, father, and I had to stay in the house all the time.

There was an overbearing and relentless feeling of suffocation. At the suggestion of my mother, who was very concerned for me, I started applying to colleges in the United States.

In retrospect, I feel lucky I got to experience the first two years of the Intifada in Ramallah, particularly during the invasion. I had a small digital camera back then. I didn't take a lot of photos, even though I like photos a lot. I do remember once going to Arafat's headquarters after the first time the IOF attacked it with their tanks and F-16s, and I took a few photos of the destruction inside one part of the building. A Palestinian security officer who was there saluted me for taking photos that bore witness to the devastation. I don't remember what happened to the photos, even though I printed them and organized them into a photo album later. I still regret losing these and others I took during the Intifada, as they were the only contribution I made during the uprising, and I wanted to show people outside Palestine what it looked like to destroy our leader's presidential headquarters when he could do nothing to stop it.

In the fall of 2002, I enrolled at Bard, a liberal arts college in upstate New York. There, the liberal environment and the somewhat pro-Palestinian faculty and student body was welcoming despite the small yet powerful Zionist presence that tried to undermine the political activities for the Palestinian cause. I initially joined the Students for Justice in Palestine. But because I was the only Palestinian, and only the second Arab in the entire student body at the time, and due to the overwhelmingly white liberal student body, political activism for me consisted mostly of organizing a lecture for a famous speaker on Palestine and fundraising to bring Palestinian rap bands to campus. I was continually vexed by the fact that most of the students who engaged in activism for Palestine did so as part of a more general liberal impulse to express support for Palestine and Tibet and other wretched countries, rather than because of the justness of the Palestinian cause per se. On the other hand, some of my Jewish American friends who identified as “liberal” Zionists reached out to me to “tone down” the other liberal students’ rhetoric about Palestine, especially when they called for “free Palestine.” And at Bard, I continually had to explain being a Palestinian. Given this situation, I focused on introducing the perspectives of Palestinians in cultural domains, and sometimes on mobilizing to bring a pro-Palestinian guest speaker to the campus, most famously Joseph Massad, and also my father, who as an academic was himself doing research in the United States in 2003.

When I graduated from Bard, I didn’t want to return to Palestine. I didn’t want to go back to the stifling suffocating feeling I had when I was there. I wanted to be free from the family duties inside the home. While at Bard, every year on summer vacation, I went home and did internships. Ramallah had changed a lot from the time of the invasion. There was no trace of destroyed streets, cars, or buildings. Life had returned to normal. I dreaded the long journey from the United States to Amman and later to the Allenby Bridge and then finally to Ramallah. And I dreaded the fact that I was not able to get out of Ramallah to go to Jerusalem, Haifa, or Yaffa if I wanted to. The permit regime had become so entrenched and pervasive that we had to live with these restrictions for good. Instead, I thought I would live the American dream: move to New York City, get a job with a human rights organization or even a research institute on Palestine. Oftentimes my interviewers, although impressed with my Arab Palestinian background, also told me that I didn’t have the necessary experience to get a job, whether in research or administration.

I decided to attend Georgetown University’s Center for Contemporary Arab Studies, where I did my Masters in Arab Studies. I got to know a good group of Arab Americans, and students from different parts of the Arab world. Together, we went to demonstrations against the war on Gaza

in 2008–2009, and held a commemoration of the Nakba on campus and in front of the Israeli embassy in Washington, D.C. The intellectual environment and meeting some Egyptians got me more interested in Egypt, and in identifying as both Egyptian and Palestinian. Of course, the Israel lobby and other Zionist groups on campus always tried to compete with our messages and sometimes disrupted our demonstrations.

It is this background and these experiences that I bring to my reading of my mother's Ramallah Letters.

OVERCOMING THE VIOLENCE

Writing the Ramallah Letters offered my mother an individual healing process to make sense of the brutal invasion. Her own motivation was to work through the bombardments, shelling, curfews, and other events that happened during the spring of 2002. She initially wrote about this violence to one person, her friend Mona in Egypt, but recipients of her letters came to include those on an email listserv comprised of my mother's friends and acquaintances who were living across the Arab world. For even though satellite channels such as Al Jazeera in the Arab world, and CNN and BBC elsewhere, reported the news coming from Palestine, these outlets were not enough, nor were they reliably fair to the Palestinian story, though Al Jazeera did report daily the acts of the IOF against the Palestinians, and the numbers of casualties.

In the mainstream media and more generally, Palestinians have been accustomed to what Mourid Barghouthi calls the Israeli Zionist narrative: stories that dispossess our people and malign, erase, or deny our existence by robbing our voices. But my mother was determined to tell stories of Palestinians' daily resistances to remain on this land and to assert our right to exist. The invasion of the West Bank became a somewhat distant memory for most Palestinians, not because they were unable to tell their stories, but rather because it served as another phase of discipline and punishment by the occupying power. The exhaustion and sapping of people's energies that happened during the Second Intifada's invasion shifted their eyes to just looking forward and wanting to move on with their lives.

Against these intentional and unintentional acts of forgetting of yet another traumatic episode in the colonial occupation of Palestine, my mother's accounts of life in these extraordinary conditions empower and humanize us, as they render Palestine and Palestinians' lives more than mere numbers on the news. Her stories help to repair some of the broken dignity those among us have suffered. In the remainder of this narrative, I reflect on some of the letters I feel most strongly about today.

Writing about the feelings we had when we were invaded, our roller-coastering emotions, and our anxieties throughout the days of the spring invasion required my mother to be a keen observer, and to extricate herself from the unfolding events and surrounding space in order to document what she heard and saw. Because oftentimes it was more pressing to participate in rather than to record what was happening, the letters are not daily, and not exhaustive in detail.

Through writing this testimony of the invasion, my mother gave voice to the many people whom she knew, heard about, or encountered. In the first letter, we learn about Jad, who was an officer in the Anti-Drug Enforcement Unit in the Palestinian police. He was also my brother's best friend, and on the day he was brutally and cruelly killed by the Israeli soldiers, we had begged him to stay in our house. However, he vehemently refused. We had just heard the news of thirty young Palestinians shot at by the IOF and abandoned without the IOF having granted permission for them to receive medical treatment. The Red Crescent and doctors were not able to get to them because of the imposed curfew. Jad was determined to join his comrades, the rest of the security forces who had been left out in the streets of Ramallah after the IOF's bombardment of the Ramallah police station led to their leaders' orders to evacuate all the official buildings. The extent of the violence from the IOF, and the fact that the Palestinian leadership was paralyzed, without a way to respond to the vulnerability of their people, rendered everyone helpless, including the members of the security forces. And Israel had no intention to respect the Geneva Conventions or to fulfill their responsibilities toward the people under their occupation. These conditions resulted in my brother's friend being killed and left dead in the cold, rainy April weather. My brother was devastated, and my mother wrote about Jad's ordeal to her friends partly to offer emotional support for my brother, to help him try to move on.

The invasion of Ramallah started on March 29, 2002. My mother began her first letter to Mona on April 1, in response to Mona's one-line email: "How are you doing under the invasion?" This question opened my mother's pent up emotions. She wanted to convey to her friend exactly what happened. In this first and shortest letter, my mother appeals to her friend, who is a journalist, to use her network of friends and acquaintances, and she implores her to consistently lobby and organize Egyptians in protests and demonstrations to put pressure on Israel to stop its "impending massacre" of the Palestinians, especially after the scores of summary executions and injured men we heard about on the first days of the invasion in Ramallah.

By the second Ramallah Letter, on April 3, 2002, my mom had received many responses to the first letter after her friend forwarded her email to their

mutual friends in Egypt, Lebanon, and elsewhere in the Arab world. Since the standard language of the emails is English, she kept writing in English, even though her readers were Arabs. The second letter started, "Dear Mona, Mounir, and all dear friends in Egypt."

This second letter confirms the news of the thirty young Palestinian security officers' deaths and the scores of others injured and arrested after a humiliating reception from the IOF. My siblings, Maher and Sireen, and my mother went to the Ramallah hospital to donate blood when the curfew was lifted for a few hours that day. The night before, the IOF bombarded the building of the Preventive Security office in Beitunia, while four hundred people, including sixty female officers and their families, were locked down inside. We could hear the bombing as we watched the events unfolding on the news. But I mostly remember the day we went to the Ramallah hospital. The arrival of hundreds of people to bury the dead from the previous week in the parking lot of the hospital was surreal. A mass grave was dug for tens of people as their families came and had to open the white bags to check who was who among the dead relatives. This was too much to bear. That's when a group of us women started shouting slogans the likes of "ya flasteen ma nseenaki kul el watan el arabi fadaki," "O Palestine, we have not forgotten you, all the Arabs sacrifice themselves for you." It was a moment of massive breakdown that the news broadcast, and Raja, an acquaintance of my mother, started shouting hysterically to lament this situation. My sister reacted angrily, insisting to my mother that we go home right away, as in the midst of our small protest, Israeli soldiers had started shooting again to disperse us. We were unaware of this until Sireen started yelling, telling us to stop immediately, and to run away from the snipers who were atop the building next to the hospital. Villagers usually come to Ramallah to sell their vegetables and fruits, but since the curfew was imposed, they could not come to the devastated city that day, so we went home not only shaken, but also with no groceries.

Beyond the personal stakes involved in writing about Jad and my brother, the letters provide glimpses into the targeting and victimization of the Palestinian security forces, especially on the first days of the invasion. Jad came to symbolize this victimization and helplessness in the face of the Israeli military machine (Letter 5, 12/4/2002: Jad is found but dead). Yet because my mother's motivation to write about this and other stories also was to heal herself of the trauma of the invasion, it was difficult for me to ask her to go back in her memory and talk about the letters, because she intended to let go of the trauma of the invasion through writing about it. Even today, no one wants to remember the Second Intifada because it was a massive failure for the Palestinian cause. The number of sacrifices from Palestinians did not match the

achievements of the Palestinian leadership in creating a national resistance movement that encompassed the whole of the society.

In the Ramallah Letters, however, my mother tells not only of losses and traumatic events, but also about organizing with other women to help others in need. Although it was impossible then to envision any kind of political organizing against the invasion and Israeli measures, we do see women getting together to fetch food and other necessities (Ramallah Letter, 6/4/2002: Jenin Camp). This is why my mother was not content with just telling her friends outside Palestine how bad it was for her and others during that Spring. As she came together with other women and men, we read about the challenges and opportunities they faced when working to create a space of steadfastness in the midst of chaos. For instance, she wrote about the time when she and her friend Suad got food for Suad's old mother-in-law, who insisted on remaining in her home even though it is right by the Muqata, Arafat's headquarters, and a military target. If given the opportunity, even the cats there devoured the bread they brought with them. As women, they had more mobility during these difficult times than the men, who were easier targets for Israeli shooting (Ramallah Letters 3, 6/4/2002).

The extremity of the invasion for me was captured by a nameless woman who quite literally experienced a nervous breakdown. My mother wrote about the case of a pharmacist who had a breakdown after her husband was arrested and taken to an unidentified location (Letter 6, 13/4/2002). In this remarkable story, the only thing we know about the woman is that prior to the invasion, she had bouts of depression that required constant monitoring. But here we see her losing her wits, risking her life and the lives of her children to appeal to her helpless besieged leader to intervene with the IOF to release her husband! This complete breakdown was situated in the context of forced geographical and physical rupture from families and friends.

Amidst such breakdowns and ruptures, we experienced a widespread disenchantment with the so-called peace process that led to the invasion. The disappointment is evident in "A Road Littered with Disappointment." That letter flashes back to the day when my siblings, mother, and I went out like thousands of others in Ramallah to celebrate what we thought was a movement towards peace. The image of the angry soldier kicking my brother's olive-brandishing hands with his black boots sums up, in retrospect, the fact that Israel never wanted peace. On the contrary, the Israeli state wants more lands, so even as it talks peace, it continues to build settlements that drive the Palestinians out or further encircle them in small, disconnected enclaves where families can't see each other or live together. In her letter, which she later published in *Bitter Lemons*, my mother grapples with this truth.

My mother's letters capture not only the political currents that accompanied the invasion, but also its gendered dynamics, and its impact on our daily life. In Ramallah Letters 7, 17/4/2002, titled "Independence Day," my mother wrote about the seeming normality of my father's reaction to the long curfew and "Israel's Independence Day," where in "our prison" my father was yelling at my sister for not cleaning the house or doing any of the house chores. Coping with this extreme political and military oppression was more difficult for him than for my mother and her women friends; they always found ways to circumvent difficult circumstances.

MAKING HISTORY: FROM THE RAMALLAH LETTERS TO THE PRESENT

In reading the Ramallah Letters, I have been able to trace the lines of continuity between my activism and that of my mother's, even as the Letters also provide a historical perspective that accounts for differences between the time of the Second Intifada and now. Back in Palestine in January 2011 after finishing my Masters degree in Arab Studies from Georgetown University, I met a group of young Palestinians who demonstrated for Egypt and Tunisia when their revolution started. I witnessed how the Palestinian security forces, trained by American Lieutenant-General Keith Dayton, harassed the men who demonstrated, detaining and beating them. Dayton served as the US Security Coordinator for Israel and Palestine. At the behest of George W. Bush in 2005, toward the end of the Second Intifada, Dayton trained over 500 Palestinian men in an ostensible "security sector reform" program. He famously announced to the Washington Institute for Near East Policy, a pro-Israel think tank, that he had "created a new kind of Palestinian man." This entailed training men from the Palestinian National Security and Presidential Guards, who were vetted by US, Israel, and Jordan security services. Since the Second Intifada, the "new" Palestinian men have served Israel's and the United States' interests, suppressing any Palestinian opposition to the Oslo Agreement or to the subsequent political system.²

Taking to the streets of Ramallah with these youth felt like our time as Palestinians to claim our future, and to demonstrate against the split between Hamas and Fatah and the further cutting off of Gaza and the West Bank. For our first protest, on March 15, 2011, the turnout was massive. Many previously unpoliticized young people came to the streets to say we are here, finally. The Manara Square, the city center, held us all that sunny warm March day in Ramallah. Leaders from various political parties came, too, and so did the Fatah Shabiba (youth). "The people want the end of the split," the crowds roared. That day, we realized that the Fatah youth came to sabotage the demonstration by calling for allegiances to Abu Mazen and

badmouthing Hamas. To circumvent this attempt, the youth who were unaffiliated with any political party raised the call for elections to the Palestinian National Council. Elections would rise above the polarization in Palestinian politics, we thought. Similar demonstrations were happening in Gaza, Bethlehem, Nablus, and inside 1948 Palestine that day. For the first time since the Second Intifada, perhaps, all of Palestine rose up together.

From the beginning, however, the Palestinian Authority (PA) in the West Bank, particularly in Ramallah, succeeded to a large extent in containing the demonstrations or coopting them to its interests either by cracking down on some youth, or by inviting others to the Presidential Headquarters to hear their grievances. In Gaza, Hamas similarly suppressed the youth. The political split between Hamas and Fatah defied the sense of hope and early euphoria that came with the Arab uprisings, especially the massive demonstrations on the streets of Tunis and Cairo. During the First Intifada, we were the ones to “rock the boat,” to resist the oppression and injustice in the Arab world. The youth hoped to recreate these days of the First Intifada, especially their mass civil disobedience campaigns that brought together disparate socioeconomic groups, and women and men of different political factions.

Only in retrospect, after reading my mom’s letters again, did I remember the times when she went out to protest in the Manara Square with other men and women and political leaders against the IOF. It struck me that demonstrations against the high cost of living, demonstrations for the 2012 prisoners’ hunger strike, protests against political arrests by Hamas and Fatah, and protests against the negotiations all happened in the Manara Square. During the Second Intifada, the Manara was the place where the Israeli tanks and army jeeps were stationed to prevent people from gathering. It dawned on me, and others, too, that the Manara was the only space left for us to raise our voices. Palestinian security officers and policemen had replaced the Israeli tanks, this time in the name of maintaining “law and order.” So in February 2012, a group of us—from the ages of sixteen to forty, employed and unemployed, high school and university graduates, men and women affiliated and unaffiliated with all major Palestinian parties—instead of going to the Manara, decided to occupy the street in front of the newly renovated Muqata, the Presidential headquarters where Abu Mazen works, to protest the return to the negotiations. Each time we protested in front of the Muqata, the police and undercover agents made sure to be there, too, to prevent us from crossing to the street where the actual Muqata was, and we liked the challenge because they wanted us to go to the Manara square instead.

Especially given the history of the Manara Square, the decision not to hold our protest there was a significant one. During the First Intifada, the IOF did not massively deploy tanks like they did during the Second Intifada.

The level of violence was much less than the extremely punitive collective measures against the population during the Second Intifada. During the First Intifada, the beautiful construction of the Square's roundabout was destroyed so that the Israeli jeeps could be fast enough to chase the stone-throwing youth. During the Second Intifada, the Israeli Mirkava tanks replaced the jeeps, in a blatant demonstration of their occupation of the space. After the end of the Second Intifada, the Square again became the site of protest for Palestinians, replacing the checkpoints at the entrances of Palestinian cities. Not meaning to be cynical or dismissive about this, going to the Manara epitomized the extent of, and the limits to, the Palestinian people's ability to mobilize in the post-Oslo period. To resist this immobilization is why the youth held marches from the Manara to Rukab Street, then Clock Square (now Arafat Square), then to the Muqata. To overcome Occupation it is not enough to express our discontent with the sham negotiations, the Oslo Accords, and the Paris Protocols that also have shackled Palestinians. This is why we have needed to bring our protests to the Muqata, but the more we defy the Palestinian police orders to confine our protests to the Manara, the more adamantly they have suppressed us from going to the PA presidential headquarters. The President does not want more annoyances resulting from the occupation. Yet for us youth, it was important to go out on the street and demonstrate, not only at the PA's headquarters, but also at contact points with the IOF, such as the checkpoints at Qalandiya and Bet El. These seemed like better options than confining ourselves to Ramallah. What was the point of protesting the occupation just amongst ourselves, where we cannot necessarily always see, but certainly still feel, the forces stationed all around us?

My becoming a political activist excited my mother and family. At the individual level I felt that it was my opportunity to do what some of my family members did in their youth. Going to the streets with other youth gave me a breath of fresh air and hope and a small sense of freedom by choosing to get out, to try to raise the awareness of people about the long and heroic hunger strikes of Khader Adnan and Sana Shalabi, Thaer Halahleh, and other political prisoners. To prevent the security forces from singling out any of us, we made plans to go out in groups of three or four. We often split into groups of two men and two women, both to have some gender equality and also because the presence of women helped protect the men from possible violence.

A turning point in this activism happened at the end of June 2012, when we went out to protest the impending visit of Mofaz to Ramallah. Mofaz was the Israeli Chief of Staff during the Second Intifada, and he was personally responsible for the Jenin massacre and the isolation of the late Yasser Arafat and Arafat's subsequent poisoning and death. How could the PA and the Palestinians forget this and not reject with full force his visit to where Arafat lived,

of all places! We were only about a hundred people going to the Muqata to make sure that Abu Mazen heard us, but undercover agents started beating a few men in the demonstration and a subsequent “battle” ensued where we were cornered on Irsal Street, a few hundred meters from our destination. The beatings by the police continued, and as a result, more and more people came to see what was happening. Our numbers grew and some of the Palestinian commentators wrote articles deploring this extreme violence from the security forces. The second day, June 30, we decided to go to the streets again, to further protest Mofaz’s visit and the stifling of our freedom of expression. More people joined the protest, and again the police met us with extreme force. By July 1, the situation got diffused when we were “allowed” to go to the Muqata undisturbed by the police, who were ordered not to obstruct our movement.

Another turning point occurred on June 28, 2013. We went out to demonstrate the negotiations again and to protest the killing of three Palestinians who were shot by the IOF during a raid on the camp the morning of June 23. The martyrs were Jihad Aslan, 21, Yunis Jahjuh, 24, and Rubin Zayed, 34. The demonstration reached the end of Irsal Street, one block away from the Muqata, when anti-riot police, undercover security officers, and civil police all waited for us with their military gear, batons, police cars, and cameras to prevent us from going any further. Then a couple of policemen hit a man on the head, blood started splashing, and luckily the ambulance was there. Lots of media and press took photos and videos. Then a line of women in front of the demonstrators verbally clashed with the police officers in response to their sexist profanities and sexual harassment. The demonstration became chaotic and ended up with beatings on the heads of a few men, the physical beating of a couple of women, and tit-for-tat verbal abuse. It was a disaster and the end of the youth’s political activism. The police created video montages showing policemen distributing bottles of water to the protestors and the protestors responding by throwing the water back at them along with profanities. The end result was that the women looked very bad in the eyes of Palestinians who watched the videos and saw the photos on Facebook and TV. The security forces won. Whenever we went out to protest, they asked us, “Why are you showing us as the enemies here?” They told us, “We have family members who are martyred, who got arrested and shot at in the Intifada, when you were not even there and did not participate in it!”

I wanted to tell them that I *was* there and I lived it, that I know of Jad, my brother’s best friend, and that my mom did the impossible to save his short life. It seems that the only cry Palestinians want to hear these days are cries of jubilation for the World Cup and the Classicos, in a throwback to the “Day Dreams” letter my mom wrote on June 30, 2002. We have been exhausted

from demonstrations and from the occupation. It seems that people, beaten down, want to be passive and forget the failures of the two Intifadas.

But the truth is that activism on behalf of the Palestine cause has been rapidly growing in the United States and Europe. Since the first call of the Palestinian Campaign for the Academic and Cultural Boycott of Israel (PACBI) in 2005, the Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions (BDS) movement against Israel has been making an impact in US and European universities and economic establishments that are connected to Israel, and particularly to the Jewish settlements. The many successes tied to the BDS movement range from the American Studies Association's and other professional organizations' endorsement of the boycotting of Israeli academic institutions, to the decision of the Dutch pension fund PGGM, which oversees about \$200bn in assets, to withdraw money from five Israeli banks. The Ramallah Letters and my account of them have a part to play in this international movement. For me, this writing is a political act that I engage in to protest the status quo in Palestine.

The Israeli media succeeded in blaming Arafat and the Palestinians for the breakdown of the peace process and for the outbreak of the Second Intifada. The September 11 attacks further distracted from the injustices against the Palestinians; indeed, Israel used that event to tell the world that it is only "clamping down on Palestinian terrorism." As a corrective to these powerful distortions, the Ramallah Letters convey a Palestinian narrative that tells the truth about the crucial days of the invasion of the West Bank. It is said that history is written by the victorious, that it comes from the perspective of statesmen and political leaders. These letters, by contrast, provide a direct and often raw account chronicling the impact of Israeli measures against Palestinians during the Second Intifada. They also evidence the many forms of resistance that Palestinians engaged in during this formative period. The letters, then, help bring to life a history that might otherwise be forgotten or go undocumented.

Israel has intentionally wiped out traces of Palestinian history, to the point of invading the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics offices in Al-Bireh in December 2001, and several other offices throughout the West Bank, including in Qalqilya in 2004 (Occupation Forces), destroying all the data the Bureau had collected about Palestinians' daily lives. Palestinians who fought to resist the invasion of Jenin refugee camp also have testified that they documented in photographs and in writing the events during the two-week onslaught on the camp, including their resistance to the practices of the IOF. Yet most if not all these documents have disappeared in the midst of the systematic destruction of homes inside the camp. Publishing the Ramallah Letters in a US-based, international journal after all these years is testament to the worldwide resonance of the Palestinian cause. These letters also help expose the human rights abuses committed against Palestinians on a daily basis from

the moment we are born. These letters preserve one of many episodes of Palestinians' continuous suffering. They evidence as well an extraordinary spirit of persistence in the face of Israeli measures to bury Palestinians' existence, and as a result, a defying of its power-hungry machine.

POSTSCRIPT: LIVING PALESTINE—THE GAZA VERSION

After relieving my chest of the stories of the invasion of the West Bank, it has become a duty to write about Gaza. The current onslaught on Gaza, which started on the night of July 7, 2014 and ended in a ceasefire on August 26, 2014, adds another haunting layer to the unjust world we live in as Palestinians. West Bank Palestinians have not been able to go to Gaza since before 2007 (before Hamas took power) due to the Israeli-imposed permit regime that divides and disrupts the continuity amongst Palestinians. Reading the Letters from Ramallah again in this current situation has become a difficult task, when I feel so pulled to watch the news constantly and to tweet about the current onslaught. It is amazing how much prowess and brutality the IOF and the State of Israel is exercising to punish the Palestinians yet again for daring to want to live like human beings, free of a stifling blockade. I found myself crying, laughing, and talking hysterically, and so did scores of others with me in reacting to the systematic massacring of Palestinian families en masse, not believing that Israel is committing genocide against Gaza in broad daylight. It was therefore difficult to go back to reading and editing the Ramallah Letters, because the same story of attacking Palestinians is happening again, only on a much more brutal and massive scale that targets the basic infrastructure of Gaza, too.

Nobody likes to see bloodied streets, dismembered bodies of people, or completely annihilated neighborhoods and homes, as happened in Beit Hanoun and Shajaia. The measure of time has become only the counting of the days of the attacks and the days of the massacres. But there is hope in preserving the histories, lives, dreams and aspirations of the killed people by humanizing them and telling their stories. This is already being done in an initiative called *Humanize Palestine*, a website for commemorating Palestinian lives. I hope that telling Palestinians' stories will not only preserve the memory of Palestine as a people, since the right to live freely in Palestine is denied to date. I also hope that these stories will help bring the Israeli army and statesmen to the International Criminal Court, where they can be held accountable for their crimes. Lending support to the BDS campaign has immediate urgency, now more than ever before, not only in light of Israel's oppressive measures against Gaza, but also against those protesting the onslaught against Gaza in the West Bank and Inside '48 (the Israeli state). I am hopeful that resistance will always be the ultimate response to injustice.

THE LETTERS FROM RAMALLAH*Letters from Ramallah, 1 April 2002*

Dearest Mona,

Thank you so much my dear for your very strong and supportive words, we are really in need for it. I have been calling all people I know any where in the world to come and investigate the summary execution of so many young Palestinians in the different security apparatuses. People in the International Red Cross do not send any ambulances unless the Israeli army give them permission. A group of 30 young Palestinians were shot at, and till now 3 am they are denied any medical help. This has been the third case documented in Ramallah in these last two days. If you have any medical corps, any contact with humanitarian organisations, please do whatever you can to send them and see what is going on on the ground.

A friend of my son, Jad Khleif, gave us at least 30 calls today asking for help, he is with a group of 40 young people in a place in Ramallah, where they are in hiding, but they feel the army approaching them. I kept calling all hospitals, ambulances, International Red Cross (ICRC), and Red Crescent, they all told me the same thing, "we cannot get out and give any medical help to any body, they [the IOF] shoot at us." Jad is only 23 years old, and he lost his father in 1997 when a military jeep smashed into him in his village, Azzoun near Nablus. Jad joined the Palestinian police in 1996 in the anti drugs section, a sweet, nice young man. My son Maher insisted on him spending the night in our house. We knew that he has no family in Ramallah, but he was shy and insisted on leaving.

This morning four young men were caught in the Ramallah Islamic club [in Old Town Ramallah, 10 minute walk from our house], they were shot at from a short distance, and left bleeding to death for four hours. We don't know yet how many people were killed, or injured. In my street, we have two tanks, and at least 4 snipers around us. Mona! Mobilize every body you know, they are preparing for big massacres against us.

Today, the Israeli state TV was saying: "yes the ordinary people on the street in the Arab countries will be angry, but we should not take it seriously, because in non-democratic countries, public opinion does not count, they will never pressure their governments to decide, but the governments might take some actions to sway the anger of their people, but they will never take any serious decisions that might harm the state of Israel." The situation is very dangerous and I think you have to be very organised and 'consistent' to have an impact on what is going on now. Thanks again my dear and my kisses to you and to all our friends.

Much love. Islah

Letters from Ramallah, 3 April 2002

Dearest Mona, Mounir and all my dear friends in Egypt,

Your letters of solidarity moved me a lot, and brought more tears to my already very tired eyes. Your words encouraged me more to share with you what myself and tens of thousands of people in Palestine have been going through.

What I wrote you last time on the summary executions of groups of the Palestinian security forces are still going on. The group of the 30 people found near a small hospital in Ramallah were shot at and five of them were left bleeding to death. Their corpses were found next day and the Israeli forces detained all the others, including the injured. The number of arrested is growing very fast, we keep hearing of hundreds of people shipped in buses to nearby settlements. The 'classic reception' for detainees is to strip them of their clothes, stay completely naked, blindfolded, for days and nights under the rain (it is heavily raining in Ramallah since one week with a temperature of 7–10 Celsius degrees). The IOF let fierce dogs attack them; throw sound bombs to scare the men (these bombs are widely used by the Israeli army, it affects the hearing ability and it causes injuries if thrown from a short distance and also it makes horrible sounds as if you are close to a heavy weapon). All of them have been without food or water since four days and left out in the freezing cold. The hunt for these groups is still on going.

To tell you about 'their [the Israeli army's] visits' to our houses, it is not at all different from being visited by a group of gangsters. They went to some of my very close neighbours' houses: They started by asking all of them to stay in one room with their faces against the wall, then they entered all the rooms, they went to the kitchen to collect all the food the neighbours had and started eating it while they sat in the 'salon'. Later they took the rest of the food, took jewels, money, and electronic equipments (cameras, mobile phones, videos, etc).

Two of my neighbours have heart problems. The first thing the IOF did when they found out about their medical condition is that they got their medication pills and destroyed them in front of their eyes! And of course with the siege no one can get out to get any food, or medications. In the houses they enter, they rob computer hardware, destroy glasses and utensils, and rob people's reserves of food. Luckily, I have not been 'visited' yet.

Today, the curfew was lifted for two hours, but most of the people did not know about it but I noticed some movement in the street and I followed the flow. After 5 days of imprisonment [curfew], I was so happy to feel my feet and walk again. I took with me my two daughters, Sireen and Yasmine, and my son Maher went with us so that he can buy some cigarettes. The three of us decided to go to donate blood in the Ramallah hospital. On our way, we met so many tanks, they were blocking so many streets, we could not recognize the centre of the city, it was so devastated, and all in ruins, the buildings, the sidewalks, even the monuments in the squares were destroyed. I started to cry, Sireen shouted at

me and threatened if I keep on crying she will take me back home. We reached the Ramallah hospital, where we were surprised to know that some IOF snipers stationed themselves on the top of the high buildings around Qaddoura refugee camp. And they started to shoot! We were scared, some people said that they shoot at people and they wounded a boy of 14 years old who was on his way to buy some bread. But we decided to go on. We did not find anyone in the Blood Bank; they had all left to bury the corpses of 25 Palestinians in the hospital's parking lot! Yes . . . the parking lot. It was heavily raining and some young people were digging a big hole in the parking area. They put some wooden strips and then some blankets to lay the bodies on. Then they realised that they have to dig another hole for three corpses of women. While the three of us were waiting, we heard many stories; one of the killed was a woman who came to the hospital this morning to take off her broken leg's casting and on her way back she was shot dead by one of the snipers near the hospital. She could not imagine that they would shoot at her, an old woman with a broken leg, but it was too late to realise that she was mistaken.

I also heard so many heartbreaking stories at the Ramallah hospital parking lot. I heard about two brothers who got killed since the beginning of this Uprising. I also heard about photographers and a medical group who have been stopped by the army on their way to provide medical aid to the besieged people in the Preventive Security building. The building was up in flames; 400 people were inside with more than 60 female staff with their families and children. The army refused to let them out with their children, even worse, they besieged the building using another 60 civilians including children, elderly people and women as human shields. With these hostages, they started destroying the building with all sorts of weapons. Yesterday was a horrible night, we could not have one minute of sleep especially when you know that all the shelling and bombings are directed at 400 human beings. According to the medical group that went to the rescue of the people inside the Preventive Security building, the army stopped them, asked them to take off their clothes, threw them in the muddy rain water, and ordered them to go back walking and holding their clothes and cameras. One of the doctors said to me, and I quote: "I never realised how humiliating to walk in the middle of the night naked in the freezing cold, just because you wanted to provide a simple humanitarian aid."

The corpses started to arrive. The people carrying them placed them on the ground for the prayer. Before moving them to their temporary grave, a woman arrived and started to open the white bags to see the face of her son, another one was looking for her husband and one of her children called her aloud: "Here he is! I read his name on his bag." At this moment I collapsed. The tears covered my face but to my surprise I found myself shouting slogans and saying *bilroh, bildam nafdiki ya flistine* [Oh Palestine, we all sacrifice ourselves for you.] All the women

beside me chanted the same, tears with cries with anger with screams, and one of us, Rajai, was screaming in a hysterical way, and was saying *barra ya Sharon barra* [get out Sharon], and then she collapsed on the ground. On our way out, a mother and a brother came in a car looking for the son, and his corpse was on its way to the collective grave. They wanted to take it but the people around told them: "Don't take him. Leave him with his colleagues." The brother was puzzled and did not know what to say, but the mother pulled the corpse and said: "But let me hug him first." She entered the car and took his body on her lap and said to the brother: "Let us take him home for some time." The whole scene was horrifying, and my tears blinded me. Upon seeing me crying, my daughter [Sireen] had a fight with me, and told me: "I knew it, I knew that by coming here you will not bear the grief." She took me in a car with two other friends of mine. On our way back home, my friend was telling me how our shared friend Salwa, who is also a gynaecologist, helped women to give birth. The women called her while they were in labour and she was giving them directions over the phones on how to deliver their babies. One of the women was screaming in a hysterical way when she asked her to cut her baby's cord, she was afraid to hurt him, but she calmed her down.

I came back home very exhausted, and I did not buy anything of course, because most of the shopkeepers are from villages and they are not allowed to enter the city of Ramallah [due to the Israeli imposed closures and curfews]. Most of the shops were closed, so I asked why they asked the people to go for provisions while most of the shops are closed? My neighbour told me that they lifted the curfew so that the people can bury the dead bodies, otherwise it will be a medical disaster, as the corpses started to smell. I feel tired, frustrated, angry, humiliated, and helpless. My youngest daughter noticed my state, so to comfort me, she said: "If I can guarantee that I would kill with me at least 20 of them I would do a suicide bombing." I felt horrified and with my tears again covering my cheeks, I told her: "We want to live, we love life and we have to defeat death." Then she insisted, "yes, but how do we do that? do we have many options?!" I could not answer her. I then turned on the TV to see Sharon explaining his strategy to the journalists, saying that he will allow Arafat to leave Palestine with the condition of not coming back, it is a "one way ticket."

The journalists were laughing and the Israeli commentators were saying that all this power show is to destroy a historical phase of the Palestinian national history. The aim is to 'eliminate' a whole national elite, all the new leaders formed in the last ten years they want them out, with their families, and the only obstacle, they were debating, is to where, to Egypt, to Jordan, or to Lebanon, they could not decide yet.

The news shows many other heart breaking images from the protests of Arabs against the Israeli invasion. Why do people have to be beaten and humiliated

this way? The Israeli commentators were gloating and saying: “Did we not tell you that the Arab public opinion does not matter? Look at the Arab citizens; they do not even have the freedom of expression, look how they are treated. Palestinians living in Israel should pray day and night for the state of Israel for its ‘tolerance’ and democracy.” After hearing this, I decided to not watch TV and write you instead.

Dear friends, you can do a lot of things, you cannot imagine how your demonstrations raised our spirit, soothed our anger and frustration. Organising demonstrations with clear demands is so important. I wrote few weeks ago an article, which was kept unpublished for many weeks in the Palestinian local newspapers, saying that we have to stop asking for changes, we have to impose them, we have the power to impose our demands. Large strikes of engineers, lawyers, doctors, artists, and students might impose the expulsion of the Israeli ambassador in Egypt and Jordan. Contacting other union groups in America and Europe to impose sanctions on Israel is also important. Even the former Israeli parliament member Sholamit Alloni said in a recent declaration commenting on the Israeli army’s treatment of Palestinians, “The Israelis used every Nazi practice, and what’s left for them to equal Nazis is to place Palestinians in gas chambers.”

You have to urge writers, artists and others to voice their opinion, make common appeals, target international human rights organizations, answer any bad article about the Palestinians on the internet, criticise the CNN, and you should criticize the International Red Cross. It is impossible for such organisations to accept the occupier’s rules; what is the difference between an international organisation and us, who are under occupation if they accept the occupier’s rules like us? You should pressure them [the ICRC] to take a position against the Israeli occupation measures and you need to be vocal about their inhumane treatment against detainees. I kept calling the ICRC every day to ask what I can do to provide help, to tell the workers to go and protect the besieged groups in hiding and to prevent their summary executions, and to tell them about the case of one of our neighbours who was short on oxygen for his medical condition. I even called the ICRC to help me fetch a gas tank for cooking to feed my family, and to help a woman to bury her mother who had died 15 hours earlier. Every time I gave them a call, they told me the same thing, mainly that the Israeli army does not allow us to move, that the city I am in is a military zone and they won’t allow any international aid personnel to go anywhere near the soldiers. If they cannot move or provide aid, why are they here? If they have to wait for the curfew to be lifted to check on the well being of those who are under siege, then why doesn’t the ICRC speak up about these occupation practices and expose Israel’s true nature to the world, this very spoiled state?

It is also important to link school students with our students here, it is very important to politicize these students. Ah, the shooting is becoming so heavy

now; I don't know what they are shooting at. I hope that the army did not find any other of these young men from the Palestinian security forces. I have to leave you now; it is becoming dangerous to stay behind my computer as I am sitting very close to the windows. Thanks again for your great words to me and to all of us here, the support you are giving me and all of us here is very important. My love to all of you, Mona, Mounir, Amira, Amina, Dina, Joclyne, Zein, Hani, I am sure that you will never forget me or us here, we need you my friends.

Much love. Islah

Letters from Ramallah, 6 April 2002

Dear Mona and Mounir and all my great friends in Egypt and everywhere,

The so many messages of support I got from you were so important to feel my humanity again and feel the so many humans around us. It is so important that your voices reach all human beings who refuse and want to do something to stop this very spoiled country from violating all norms of humanity.

Yesterday, 5th of April, they lifted the curfew from 1 pm to 4 p.m. We heard so many conflicted times of the exact lifting of the curfew. It seems that they [the IOF] decided to make it at 1pm, after the end of the Friday sermon and to prevent people from burying their dead. In the morning, I got a phone call from Siham Barghouthi who spoke to me about her sadness and frustration after the killing of Hisham and Abu Hussein. These two were simple guards of Feda's office [a leftist authorised political party in Ramallah]. What happened to them was similar to what happened to my son's friends, they were besieged and locked in their places without food or water and the only contact with the outside world was their mobile phones. There were three in that office in Arizona building in Ramallah [on Rukab Street]: Ahmad Ghanaïem, Abu Hussein and Hisham. Fire was opened at their office, they started to call Siham to see a way to get them out, Siham went through the same cycle I went through, calling the Red Cross, the Red Crescent, international organisations, municipalities but to no avail. Ahmad Ghanaïem realised that there is no help coming in the way, he threw himself out of the window to fall from the second floor and injured his back. He was immediately arrested and since then no body knows any thing about him. Abu Hussein and Hisham kept calling Siham again to the last minute when they asked her to take care of their families. The next day, their bodies were found thrown in the street in front of Rukab building, the famous ice cream shop in downtown Ramallah. Siham collapsed, she said I kept screaming and crying and kicking my head against the wall, how she could not save their lives, how she was that helpless. Well, at 1 I got out to the street looking for cooking gas and to see if there is any fresh vegetables or fruits in the marketplace. On my way to the gas shop, two big tanks were in the street, and I was ordered to go back and not enter that

street. I asked the people on the street if there are any other shops, they said don't think about it, there is no gas in town.

I decided to go to downtown Ramallah, where a group of us on the street wanted to protest the presence of the army. On my way, I felt myself living in one of these movies showing the long lines of arrested Jews and other with their gloomy and tired faces. On the street crossing the Ramallah police station, I saw a long line of detainees, with their hands over their heads, escorted by two tanks in the back and one tank in the front, in the middle two lines of soldiers were pointing their guns at them. I wanted to know where they are taking all these young people; I followed them from another street. I was shocked when I saw that they escorted them to the building of the ministry of culture around which many other tanks were stationed. Why in this particular building, why they did not arrest them when we were under curfew, why showing them like this and let every body see them and could not do any thing? We, as women, used to confront the soldiers to wrest the young people whom they wanted to arrest from their hands in the first uprising in 1987. So why we cannot do that now? At that time we used to have eye contact with the soldiers, defy them, talk to them, tell them don't you have mothers, don't you have children like ours, go back home why are you here. But this time they are very distant, they are all hiding in these big horrible iron tanks, no way to approach them, they are also so scared and they shoot to kill anyone approaching them immediately.

So I kept walking to the Manara Square, where the statues of the 4 lions stand tall in its midst, only to see a devastating scene: garbage everywhere, the asphalt is gone and replaced with dirt road. None of the women who planned to come to the protest as we had planned earlier showed up. There were only soldiers hiding inside their tanks. From their hideout they pinpointed the edges of the tank guns at whoever approached them. It was a scary scene. What even made it scarier is that I saw a lot of smashed cars in the square, destroyed sidewalks, destroyed buildings and shattered glass everywhere my foot stepped on. Oh, dear Ramallah, what happened to you, all this destruction, all this ugliness, again tears poured down my face.

I left the Manara to the marketplace, which is walking distance from the Manara to see if any of the vegetable vendors have anything to sell. I found nothing fresh: I managed to find very old bananas and very old green peas. Before the invasion, 1 kilo of bananas used to cost NIS 10, which is equivalent to \$2.90. The vendor was yelling his lungs out to sell 4 kilos for NIS 10. I bought two kilos, better to have old green peas than no peas at all, I thought to myself. I went to the bakery to get some bread. The line of people waiting to get bread was impossible too long. There was no bread so the bakery workers had to make the dough. After an hour standing in line, I left the bakery with my two kilos of green peas. On my way many women stopped to ask me if there were any

tomatoes, cabbage? No, only old lemon, very old bananas and some potatoes I told them. Of course there was no meat (lamb/beef) at all, no chicken and fish is out of the question, and some eggs can be found, I told them. [. . .] On my way back, I met Suad Amery, my very good friend whom I missed so much; we hugged. Salim [Tamari], her husband was calling me every day to ask about her news, as her phone line has been disconnected since the beginning of the occupation of the city, and his mother for her bad luck is living very close to the presidential compound, where Arafat is, and all the area has no phone lines, all disconnected. He keeps asking me if he can come back from Paris, yes you can come back but how are you going to enter Ramallah, we are under curfew I said. Suad took me in her car, she needs to see Salim's mother, an old lady of 89 years old, most of her close neighbours left the building and she is with Zakeya, another old lady to take care of her.

Suad had some bread for her, which we managed to get after waiting for 40 minutes, some milk and some medications. We approached Im Salim's mother's street, the tank there immediately points its gun at us. We raised the bread bag to show that we need to deliver some food; they don't allow us to use her main door, but the back of the building from her neighbour's house. We cried out at Zakeya to come out and get the things, she comes out saying: "we are alone in the building, the next door neighbours gave us some bread, the woman baked for her family and for all her neighbours too, the shooting is horrible around us, we cannot sleep day or night, but today is better. I just need to move my feet a bit, even when they lift the curfew we cannot go out, we are so close to the president's compound." Im Salim is on her bed, she does not want to see anybody, what for if she cannot talk to you, what for just waving for you, she is OK. She asks to throw the bread bag for her, we did. But to our surprise, many cats immediately appeared, attacking the bread bag, poor ones, they are hungry, very hungry, and there was no left over food for them. We left the cats eating one loaf, we wanted them to take it out of the bag before Zakeya arrives but we did not want them to eat all of it. We were perplexed between leaving them eat some and kicking them away for not eating it all. Zakeya arrived, so we plead her to give them the loaf they are eating, and she did but only after giving us blaming looks. We leave the building, the machine guns of the tanks were pointing at us again.

We finally reached my house and had a chance to chat together for half an hour before we heard the sad news of the killing of 6 Palestinian Hamas affiliates whom the army encircled in a house in Tubas, which is a village in the governorate of Jenin. The army shot all of them, first killing 4 of them and then 2 of them tried to surrender themselves to the army by getting out of the house, carrying white flags. But the army did not accept this act of surrender and shot both men dead. The army doesn't want to capture anyone it seems, as they have no

place for detainees in the Israeli prisons. In Al-Bireh, the twin city of Ramallah, the Israeli army detained 800 people, released 200 of them, and is still detaining 600, and that is from a small town like Al-Bireh. The army also established a new prison, Ansar III in the Negev desert. As if they are going to imprison all of the people of Palestine! Some of the released prisoners have talked about the treatment they received in prison. First the army handcuffed their hands, then blindfolded their eyes, and then may have taken them to Ofra settlement in the Northern West Bank on the main road between Nablus and Jerusalem (called Route 60), or to another place, I forget now. They may have taken them to Ofer military prison, which is located West of Ramallah in the city of Beitunya. The released detainees also said that they were attacked by fierce dogs, and then thrown into a ditch where the army threw sound bombs around them. We hear the same story over and over again.

We heard that those men they released, they asked them to go home walking, even under the imposed curfew, so that they shoot at them. Some of them had to pass through one house to the next to avoid walking in the street. It took one of them one day and half to reach his house.

We also heard the news of destroying old quarters in the old cities of Bethlehem and Nablus. My friend Suad is in pain from hearing such devastating news. The soldiers are now occupying the campus of Bethlehem University, which has many old beautiful buildings. The army took it as a military camp. The old city in Nablus also has historical places, and the UNESCO has to save them, as well as the civilised world should not allow their destruction; it will be a huge loss for civilisation and humanity. Suad is an architect and she runs the Riwaq centre of the preservation and renovation of old Palestinian places and buildings. They have been attacking the old buildings with rockets, and they destroyed many buildings in the Qasbah's old city in Nablus. Who can stop these barbaric acts? Who can save our wretched people, the buildings and history? Who can save the prisoners, the injured and the dead?

Suad wanted to leave my house, so I gave her my cell phone to be able to contact her. She phoned me when she arrived safely to her house. She said on her way back she met two people who needed a ride to their home. One of them had just buried his uncle and the other one had buried his father. They said that a funeral was not allowed! Even the dead could not be buried honourably in their graves. The army prevented the Palestinians from wrapping their dead people in the national flag, and they prevented the funerals so that Palestinians are not shown as people who mourn but they want this campaign to look like a campaign against 'terrorists.' That's why they stationed their tanks in the Ramallah main square, so that the people cannot go on demonstrations while their 'operation' is taking place.

I am hearing terrible noises around me right now; I got to see what is going on, and found that the soldiers have blocked my street with smashed cars rubble from the beautiful Friends School playground wall, which is next to my street. It seems that they want to prevent the movement of all cars when they lift the curfew next time, which also means that they are not leaving soon, it seems. Keep your voice heard my friends, keep protesting by all means and ways to stop this occupation from growing, you are our only windows to the world, they keep shooting at journalists, they let them come to the city when they lift the curfews, they don't want the world to see how they became such a degraded state. Force Israel to come to its senses. The Israeli public is still giving lots of support to this war criminal Sharon; as he got yesterday 72% of people approving his 'actions' against the Palestinians, and 65% trust his leadership of the country. But we still have some very faithful Israelis to their humanity, protest every day, they are subjected to very violent treatment from their police, they get death threat for supporting the Palestinians. We have all to join hands to stop this barbarity from growing. My love to you all and I know that all your hearts are with us now.

Islah Jad

Letters from Ramallah, 6 April 2002

Dear Mona, Mounir and any body who has the power to do something, I got a phone call from a friend in Jenin, where his house is next to the Jenin refugee camp; he can see the entire camp from his house. He counted more than 400 apache missiles thrown on the refugee camp. His friend Ibrahim Said inside the camp lost his 19-year-old son, Walid, and since 2 days now he has been unable to go to the hospital to bury him. The IOF are NOW removing (bulldozing) some houses at the eastern entrance of the camp to widen the street of 20 meters to make a space to their tanks for enter the camp.

The Palestinian armed men stopped the shooting for 20 minutes to enable some women and children and the elderly to go and fetch some water. They have been arrested by the army and used as a human shield in front of the tanks. The apache shot at the oxygen section in Jenin hospital to destroy it. So many bodies are scattered in the narrow alleys of the camp need to be taken to the hospital, and it is impossible for the camp residents to help the injured, any body who approaches them gets shot at immediately. The Red Cross declared that they will 'minimize' the movement of their staff because it becomes very risky for them to move. This massacre has to be stopped immediately. Contact any medical corps you know of, to protest, to demonstrate in front of the Red Cross, to announce partial civil strikes, to pressure the Israeli government to allow medical aid for the injured and removal of the corpses from the street. Act now, immediately please,

Kamel told me that the people estimate the number of those killed in the Jenin camp not less than 100. Awaiting your response as soon as you can.

Love, Islah.

Letters from Ramallah, 7 April 2002

Today, they [IOF] demolished Hendeza building with an F16 bomb, a building of 7 floors turned into rubble. An old woman refused to leave her house; she is buried now under the rubble. They commit war crimes but who will punish them? Amal said but people in Jenin refugee camp manage with their injured, she insisted by saying that they have a 'field hospital', I was surprised and I wished that what she is saying is true. I said but yesterday I heard the head of a first aid clinic there and he does not say that they have a 'field hospital'. She adds, "No, I have a friend there and she told me that some 'shabab' young youth in the camp collected all towels and Kuffiyas (Palestinian scarves) and put them in a big bucket of water and they boil them on coal because they have no electricity of course." They use these towels as sterilized band-aids. I retorted: "But these might be useful for light injuries but what about serious injuries?" "No, they die if they have serious injuries," she said. I felt so depressed and angry.

Letters from Ramallah, 9 April 2002

Dear friends everywhere,

Today is day 11 of the re-occupation of Ramallah. We hear less shootings but from time to time we hear explosions of forced entry into houses and I keep hearing the same stories over and over again. The IOF ask everyone to gather in one room, to start 'searching' supposedly for people, but in many cases they were actually 'searching' for something else: money, jewellery, laptops, and mobile phones among others.

Janine Albina, my friend who lives in the neighbourhood street above our street just gave a call to tell me that she cannot be connected via e-mail first because she has no electricity and second because the IOF stole her laptop after their 'visit'. She is a neighbour to Elan Halevy (Israeli citizen) who is in France, they 'visited' his apartment and every thing was put up side down. Majdi al Malki, who is also a nearby neighbour, they used his house for two days, used the bath, kitchen, food, sleep, then stole his wife's gold and his two girls gifts. They did not forget to 'urinate' on his carpeted floor.

Today, I managed to finally get a tank of gas for cooking, it took me one hour to find it, I was so happy to get one, every body was asking me from where I got it. The usual shops for purchasing cooking gas were empty, the shopkeeper told me "you are our customer, I will tell you, they allowed us only one truck to carry gas tanks, but it is in the industrial zone you have to get a taxi, if you find,

and get one for yourself.” This becomes so difficult, but I have to get one, since two days I am using my electric oven to heat water and also for cooking. I found a taxi, take my empty bottle, go to the place, and get a bottle and come back full of happiness. I paid NIS 35 for the bottle and 30 for the taxi (12\$).

In my house, Amal my friend, was waiting for me, we have to go and give some money for a woman who lives in downtown Ramallah, and she is the second case I heard of today of having no money to buy food. So we went to her house, gave her some money; her baby had an infection since two days with fever, we told her to take him to one of the Medical Relief clinics. We went to the market to buy some vegetables and fruits, forget it. One kilo of tomatoes cost 10 sh. (2\$), in usual days we get 4 or 5 kilos for that price. I was angry, and said to the man, are not you ashamed, why you are raising the price. He denied and said, this not of us, they allowed very little quantity all from Israel, our gardens where we get the good vegetables are sealed, no bird can get out of Jenin and Nablus now.

We left without buying. I wrote down a list of things to buy, but when you see the devastation in the city, shattered windows, the dirty streets, the clouds of dust filling the air, their provocative presence of the IOF in al Manarah Square, I lose the desire to buy anything. I ask Amal about our friends in Nablus. She tells me what happened to Inas. She lives very close to the old city, the hottest point now, the IOF visited her at 3 a.m., searched her house and asked her to come with them. They took her as a human shield; they took her to her neighbour’s house far about 20 meters. They ordered her to knock the door, she rang the bell, they laughed at her and told her: “Stupid one don’t you know that we cut all power in the city?!” She uses her hand, but was pushed aside and they put a kind of dough on the door to blow the door wide open in a second while she was standing very close to the door, and she started to shiver. The house had a family of 10 people who were half asleep. To wake them up, they threw a shock grenade with huge reverberation, the mother started to weep, saying, “please don’t harm my children.” Inas started to cry to see her very proud neighbour weeping like this. They ordered Inas to leave. . . . She left her neighbour’s house in her nightgown and slippers.

In other news I heard about Jenin, the Jenin Public Hospital said that the morgue refrigerator could take only 3 corpses, they have 5 which managed to reach the hospital, the other two are left in a room to decompose, they think to bury them, the same way as in Ramallah, digging a hole in the hospital courtyard. Many injured cannot even dream of getting any medical treatment, they are left to bleed to death. This is one of the recent ‘achievements’ of the Israeli army, a record in new humanity measures not available to any other army in the world and they still talk in their news about the ‘Jewish morals’. After failing many attempts to enter Jenin refugee camp, I hear now on the news, they decided to remove the head of the ‘operation’ and Mofaz, the army Chief of

Staff, is taking the matter in his hand. It seems that the removed officer did not show enough brutality, senselessness. Now we have to wait for the impending massacre.

I came back home exhausted as usual; I was also very tense to the point I could feel the static on my hair, and it was very dry and full of dust from the debris. I told myself I needed to take a shower. My daughter made some spaghetti again. I felt no desire to eat, but she forced me. "You have to, this might go for a long time, we have to survive, and at least we are lucky we are not dead or under ferocious bombings and shelling like in Jenin or Nablus." When she uttered Jenin and Nablus, it was too much for me and I started to cry. She forgot all about the food and joined me in crying. "It is good for our survival to cry sometimes," said Yasmine.

I just heard a terrible noise around me. I went out to see what was going on. They had blocked my street with smashed cars and rubble. The beautiful Boy Friends School [American Quakers school] playground's old wall is now used to block the street next to me. It seems that they want to stop the movement of all cars when they lift their curfew next time. This means that they are not leaving soon, it seems.

Islah Jad

Letters from Ramallah, 12 April 2002—Jad was found, but dead

I woke up this morning very tired. I could not fall asleep till 5 a.m. At 3 a.m., Saleh, my husband, woke up complaining of a severe headache. [. . .] I could not sleep after hearing the news from Jenin camp, and hearing the calls of some of the fighters left in the camp. I checked Saleh's blood pressure. It was extremely high (200/110). I could not believe my eyes. He never complained of high blood pressure. On the contrary I am the one who has been on treatment for four years.

I checked again and it was not better. He wanted to take my medication. But it is high-dosage and I know if he starts taking it he should not stop. I decided to dial up the 101 emergency numbers and see if they could get a doctor to see him. "Do you have army tanks in your street?" Asked the man's voice on the other end. I replied, "Yes from time to time, they pass by." "Then, sorry," he said, "We cannot do anything. If we come we have to take a permit and that will take hours if they agree to issue it. If we come without a permit, they will stop us, strip our clothes, and let us wait till nobody knows when." I said, OK but at least tell me if he could take my medication. He asked a doctor nearby and said, OK just give him half of my dosage. I did, but Saleh was still feeling extremely tired. I told him, "It's 'Palastinaitous' again". This is a joke about all chronic diseases Palestinians suffer from at an early age, such as diabetes, high blood pressure, heart attacks and irritable colons, and can't figure out how we suffer from such diseases while we are living in a 'peaceful heaven'.

Later, Salwa, my gynaecologist called me to tell me that a neighbour in their area was ‘visited’ by the army and some one had to be in her brother in law’s house, otherwise they might break into it and make their usual mess. She also told me that she is still giving directions to pregnant women over the phone to help them deliver while at home. She said, the latest case was for a woman from Bethlehem who was miscarrying and had been bleeding from 11p.m till 6.a.m. She had collapsed twice when her husband risked his life and took her in his arms to the hospital, telling her: “We will live together or die together.” But, luckily he arrived safely to the hospital when the whole city was under curfew.

Then I got another phone call from Amal telling me that she heard on the Israeli radio (we have no Palestinian radio, neither that of the Palestinian Authority or local stations, since the beginning of the re-occupation—all are controlled by the army and most are destroyed), that they would lift the curfew from 12 pm to 4 pm. I immediately felt reluctant to go out, every time I go out I meet people who tell me their stories and I come back with a grieving heart. She said we should go and do a sit-in on al Manara, if we can manage and if people are not preoccupied with their shopping.

I left my house and I met Mahmoud, 20 years old, and our neighbour. Both his parents are blind and he has a sister younger than him. He had been ‘visited’: he was beaten a lot and very much humiliated. They took him as a shield to the next door neighbour where he was beaten again. “The soldier wanted to entertain himself,” he said. “He stole NIS70 [14\$] from my pocket and threatened me. If you say anything to the officer, I will put a bullet in your head. You know you are all terrorists and no one will check it. I know your face, your name and if the officer hears anything I would know that it was you, don’t forget that.” But he was so happy that they did not arrest him and let him go. I left Mahmoud and went with Suad to see if we could get some fresh vegetables. We had to go to the Ramallah industrial zone. We found plenty of fresh vegetables. All the roads were torn apart and the asphalt turned into mounds of soil looking like trenches.

Suad wanted to buy some chicken. Nora, her dog, is eating almost nothing. She likes chicken necks, which have become a non-existent coin since the invasion. To our luck we fell on some fresh chicken, so we bought some for us, and some for Nora too. We come across Nabil and Vanoush (common friends) who tell us more stories about people who had been ‘visited’ by the army.

Dr. George was visited two days ago at 2 a.m. Even their dog Granda did not hear them coming. She barked when they entered the house. They asked him to open his briefcase. But in the confusion he forgot the combination code. The soldier insisted that he had to open it, but he just could not remember out of stress. Dr. George said, “It’s a funny thing, what could a doctor hide in such a bag?” He was about to be beaten—how could he dare to tell the soldier it is funny—but his Russian wife and Granda came to his aid.

Then Abu Ghazi, the young youth who used to work in my brother in law's shop, was taken out of his house when the army asked all men from 15 to 55 to show up. They kept him in the Moghtaribin School in Al Bireh for two days and half, with no food and exposed to the rain. They were all wet and shivering. They took them to Ofra military compound, where they were again left three days under the rain. They were fed for the first time after 4 days. On the fourth day they were taken inside the compound and left in a corridor to freeze of cold: they were under cold air condition while they were wet for a whole day.

The stories did not stop. Some times we laughed and at other times we cried, till my daughter Sireen arrived, very pale, very shocked. She hugged me and cried. I was terrified and I said to myself, "I knew it, I knew that I will hear more sad stories." "Jad was found," she said, "but dead." I could not believe it. If he had not gone and left our house, he would be with us now, safe, I kept telling myself. Jad was shot after the last call he gave Maher, a bullet in his head. How and where, no body knows. The group who were with him don't know what happened to him, but every body thought that he was arrested with them. But for all Palestinian detainees no body knows or can even know, once arrested, where they are taken and for how long, The Red Cross does not know and it goes without saying that we have to wait 15 days before hearing any news unless some people are released and have some information on the person we look for. Mofaz, the Israeli army chief, has activated the military order 1500, which meant not allowing any Palestinian detainee to see a lawyer or be visited before 18 days after arrest, and last we heard from the ICRC is that he was arrested with a group of 40 men, and we were relieved. Instead, Jad was found stripped of his clothes, except his underwear, in one of Ramallah's streets, lying in a pool of blood with his clothes beside him and one pair of his boots. He has been lying in Ramallah hospital morgue for 11 days. No body recognized him, and he was laid with another 3 corpses; it seems they too have no family in Ramallah. For five days Maher and I have been calling the Red Cross to see if they had any information about Jad. Then two days ago, the Red Cross had told some friends of his that he was arrested but was injured. We felt happy that he was safe. We tried to find out the name of the hospital they might have taken him to. Some people advised my son and his friends to go and check the morgue, just in case. "No", they said: "We checked the morgue of Sheikh Zayed hospital (part of Ramallah hospital) and he was not there." They were then advised to check the morgue of Ramallah hospital itself. My son saw his green jacket and his blue blouse that he had lent to Jad last time he was in our house. He was cold. The jacket and the blouse were drenched in blood, but Maher realized immediately that it was Jad, his dear friend.

Suad, Sireen, and myself went again to Ramallah hospital. "Please, Suad, don't step on the mass grave, it is just here," I said. We saw Maher coming out of the morgue and we all just cried a lot. "We told his mother," said Maher, "but

she does not want to believe us. We had to ask a photographer to take a picture of him to send it to her.” But the problem now is how are we going to send him to his village while we are under curfew and taking the road to Nablus is like mission impossible. I leave a message to Mustapha Bargouthi, asking him if there is a way to send him back to his mother after he spent 11 days unidentified. To this hour, we don’t know yet what to do. May an angel come tomorrow morning to take his body back to his home and to his mother.

Islah Jad

Letters from Ramallah, 13 April 2002: The Tragedy of IT

Dear Friends everywhere,

It took me some time to collect the bits and pieces of this ‘story’. Due to the gravity of her situation, I will leave her name out, only giving the initials of her first and last name. My sources are the husband of IT, who is a doctor, 3 of her neighbours and friends. The story of IT is a story of a declined humanity and senseless feelings. Her story shows how a human being could be killed twice, once physically and second psychologically. The tragedy starts like this: IT is a married woman with three young daughters of 5 and half years old, 3 and half years old; and 6 months. IT and her husband hail originally from Nablus and have no family in Ramallah except a sister-in-law who married with no children in downtown Ramallah. Once married, 8 years ago, IT and her husband moved to Ramallah. IT graduated as a pharmacologist; she was known as a quiet, sharp intelligent woman. She finished many courses in French and Hebrew and she speaks very good English. Her husband finished 13 years of study in England as optician and lenses expert. He runs a very successful business. IT ran her own pharmacy with two other assistants who commuted from nearby villages. Few weeks before the invasion of Ramallah, IT was obliged to liquidate her pharmacy. Her assistants were besieged in their villages beside the pharmacy itself, as it was a continuous target for Israeli fire coming from a nearby settlement. The pharmacy was close to a Palestinian post for the National Guards. The pharmacy was hit several times, the window glass was shattered and it became dangerous to be in there. IT could not run the pharmacy by herself while she has three little girls in need for her time. She decided to shut down her work. Ramallah was re-occupied on March 29th. Two days later, they heard with loud speakers that all men from 15–55 should give themselves up. After the third call S., IT’s husband gave himself up fearing that the soldiers might come to his house and destroy it as they did in other houses. Around 1000 men were gathered in Moughtaribin School. After staying two days under the rain, they had been taken to Ofra, and once taken, no body could know where they are, and how they can be contacted. IT was left alone with her three children; she used to get phone calls from friends and relatives. Her next-door neighbour used to ask if she is in

need for something, she always said no. IT's closest neighbour was not able to pay her a visit while the snipers on top of the buildings around them. After four days, the curfew was lifted for the first time. O, IT's best neighbour paid her a visit and asked her daughter to stay with IT's children to enable her to go and do some shopping for her family. O noticed that the girls were neglected and hungry, and IT was complaining that 'they took her husband because they wanted to separate them'. In an attempt to comfort her, O told her that they would release them soon. She asked when, she said maybe after one hour or so. She dashed to change and prepare her children to meet her husband. After some time, she got so nervous and blamed her for lying to her. She was surprised, but she realized that she is not OK. She left her house because of the curfew, but asked the down stairs neighbour to host her in her house. The other neighbour hosted her and her children; yet no one had any sleep that night. IT kept closing and fidgeting with the windows of the house all night fearing that the 'snipers' will shoot her. She accused the neighbours of collaborating with the army to assassinate her with her family. IT had a nervous breakdown it seems. The morning after this night, O risked her life and ran quickly to see IT, to comfort her. She left when she saw that IT calmed down a bit. That night, IT started to throw things out of her windows and ran away from her house with her children bare foot. "They want to explode the building," she said. Her neighbour told me that she took her to her house, sometime later the neighbour went to sleep, as it was already 2 am. Half an hour later, her husband came into the room shouting: "She is burning the house." She was spilling kerosene on beds and covers, and saying 'I will demolish the temple over my head and theirs too'. She threw herself over her little baby and it took the neighbours a while to get the baby out. They tried to calm her down till 7 am, when she opened the door and ran away out with her little baby in her hand and the other two holding her dress. She dashed into the street cursing Jews and Arabs. She reached a military checkpoint and some people said that she threw stones at the army. She entered the nearby building of the Red Crescent hospital followed by the army. A doctor checked her and realized that she is suffering from a nervous breakdown and she was hysterical. The doctor explained her situation to the soldiers and asked them to inform their colleagues of her case for not shooting at her. The doctor called her relatives in Nablus and her sister-in-law, but she told him that no one could come to her help as they are all under curfew. IT then left her children and ran to Ramallah hospital, where she was kept for a while, giving a shot to calm her, but she ran away again to the Red Crescent to look for her children. IT came back again to her house with her children in an ambulance. She became very violent. O asked the next-door neighbour to stay with her that night, but it was impossible for anybody to get one minute of sleep. She was sensitive to blue, rose and black colours imagining that electronic rays are going to explode the house. O asked the Red Cross and Red Crescent to bring her sister-in-law to

stay with her, but the family of the sister-in-law refused saying that the curfew is too tight and they are not allowed to move. The following day, IT was screaming to get her husband back, then she took her eldest girl and ran away again, this time she went to Arafat's Presidential compound to ask him to help her to get her husband out. Tanks and soldiers were besieging the compound. They stopped her, severely beat her up and broke her hand. The soldiers called an ambulance from Ramallah hospital to take her away. In the hospital IT gave O a call telling her that she woke up feeling pain everywhere, with broken hand and red spots all over her body but she does not know why or from where. So O talked to IT's daughter who told her that the army beat up her mother and she was screaming at them to stop them from beating her mother. Eventually the hospital managed to send an ambulance to get her sister-in-law and drove the ambulance car from Nablus to IT's house. But at 7 pm, IT's condition deteriorated and her sister-in-law became afraid. The sister-in-law called O and complained that IT became very violent and that her daughters were screaming.

IT ran away again, holding a big stone in her hand, smashing their private car and saying that 'they put cameras inside to explode the car.' The sister-in-law took the stone out of her hand but she ran away again to the presidential compound to help her finding her husband. IT arrived at the compound again but this time she was 'received' by 6 bullets in her two legs. O got a phone call from an Israeli doctor telling her that IT has been in Haddassa (Ein Karem) hospital (Israeli hospital) and she wanted to get some background information about her. O does not understand English, so she asked the doctor to find someone who can speak to her in Arabic, but the doctor did not get back to her, as it seems she did not find someone who can speak to her. IT gave O a call telling her that her two legs are in casts and she does not know how she arrived to that place. The girls were left with their aunt (sister-in-law), so O and the aunt decided to wean the baby and gave her powdered milk. After ten days of detention, S (the husband) was released, without any charges of course, only to see his family in jeopardy. S said that IT had suffered a light depression and that she was treated once by a specialist. But she was never in such condition. I asked him if he were able to visit her in the hospital. He replied by saying: "Are you joking? First, we are still under curfew, secondly, how can we go to West Jerusalem where the hospital is? I need to get an Israeli permit, but who will give it to me now?"

S has been in contact with 'Physicians without Borders,' and other humanitarian organizations to help him pay a visit to his wife. "I just need to show her that I am fine in order to comfort her, she must be now in need for my presence beside her", he said.

P.S. The names were held for privacy, if in need for any more information, I have all the details needed and the sources.

Islah Jad

Letters from Ramallah, 17 April 2002: 'Independence Day'

Dear friends everywhere,

The days have been very quiet in Ramallah, but from time to time we hear the army detonating bombs on the doors of ministries, schools, kindergartens, homes, and development agencies. Last night was exceptionally noisy. It was the 19th day of being under curfew. The nearby settlements had the sirens coming off all the time to celebrate 'Israel Independence Day,' which is for us the Nakba (Disaster Day). The two names denote the same thing, mainly the day of the creation of the State of Israel and the expulsion of nearly a million Palestinians from their homes and lands into a life of bitter exile. To add insult to injury, I have been hearing heavy machine guns and shootings in the air in a sign of joy. They are celebrating while besieging the Palestinians. It is very frustrating and humiliating.

On 15 April, a Monday, the army lifted the curfew for a few hours, and so I forgot about the need to demonstrate against the occupation and focused on purchasing the needs of the family from bread and meat. There was a lot of confusion about the hour of curfew lifting because of the uncoordinated daylight saving between PA time and Israel time. I went to a nearby baker's shop to buy bread with my daughter Yasmine. All his family was helping him: The wife and the daughter were preparing the dough, he was baking, and the son served the long line of people taking their hot loaves of white wheat bread (*Kmaj*). I felt so satisfied and happy for getting what I want. Yasmine and I later went to buy some fresh vegetables. But it was too late; almost nothing was left in the marketplace. All the fresh vegetables were Israeli products; second-class quality and even some were rotten. I got to thinking about the poor Palestinian farmers in the Jordan Valley, Jenin and Nablus regions, and whatever happened to their produce. Now is the season of harvesting tomatoes, zucchini, eggplants, and other vegetables. I am sure all got rotten by now. While standing in one of the vegetable stands, a woman came by to ask about green herbs, parsley and mint, but the vendor told her that none of these came from Nablus or the villages around the Ramallah area.

On my way back home, I saw Maher, my son, who was with some of his friends and looked tense. "Look what I found on the ground, near the place where Jad was shot, it's his medal key." I tried to change the subject, but Maher does not want to forget about Jad. He has been haunted by his memory and become very depressed as of late. He does not talk often, does not eat well, and he barely sleeps. Anyhow I also ran into Saleh, my husband on the way back home. He had left to fetch some whole wheat bread for his diabetes and he was satisfied to find some. As soon as we enter the house however, he starts yelling upon finding the house unorganized. "This girl does not want to do anything!" he said, about Sireen, my naughty middle daughter. But she is not here, I said. Suad who had just entered, said, "no matter, he just wanted to yell. Calm down, Saleh,

have a cigarette with me and come analyze the situation and what you expect will happen next.” (My husband is a Political Science professor at Birzeit University.)

In other news that happened today, I received a phone call from Zahira Kamal, my friend and a fellow women’s rights activist in Palestine. She started her long narrative about Jenin camp. She started by saying: “I went to Jenin, and whatever I tell you is not at all like seeing it for yourself! The Israeli army allowed a group of humanitarian organizations into the camp finally, mainly UNRWA and the Red Cross. The camp was in ruins. They did not let me and other women approach the camp. Outside the camp however, they placed a group of people in Jenin Charitable Society after forcing them to evacuate their homes. It was a very big crowd, and they were 20 individuals crammed into a tight room! Unbelievable!” “We took along with us some oil, sugar, and spaghetti, but some women there were mocking us, saying with bitterness, ‘How we can use them? Where? We took nothing from our houses, we don’t want food, we want you to bring our children, just give us water to drink!’ They wanted to talk, to tell their stories,” said Zahira.

One of the many stories that Zahira told me in her words is the story of a very bright girl, Maysoun Al Jada’a, who was at the time a Science major student in her third year at Annajah University, and lives in Harat al Hawashin (the area most affected by the Israeli shelling in the Jenin camp). “She told me that the next door neighbours, a family of 5 persons, were listening to the radio in order to know what is going on and if the international pressure will stop their massacre. Suddenly we heard a shrill whistle of a spiralling fast-moving missile. We thought that it is going to hit us, we all squeezed to the wall, getting so close to each other and started to recite the Quran to prepare for our impending death. Then it hit—not us, but our neighbours, the five of them all died. We kept knocking on their wall hoping to get an answer but nothing came back, only deadly silent, then the soldiers entered their house and put the radio on—some Hebrew music. We all cried when we heard the music.”

Another story that Zahira told me is that of a woman in her forties, the wife of the Imam of Jenin’s mosque (Sheikh Mohamed al Sa’adi). Zahira continued: “She told me that they announced with loud speakers that all men from the age 15, should come out. “My husband thought that being an Imam, they will spare him some humiliation, and he cannot leave his old paralyzed mother, she cannot walk, she has to be carried and none of us can carry her. He decided to stay with us. Then they called for women to come out, we left together. He was carrying his mother, and our two daughters and I followed him. They stopped him and told him, ‘Why did you come out when we called upon women and not men? Are you a man or a woman, let us check and be sure that you are a man!’ They asked him to take off all his clothes including his underwear, and to turn

around, then forced him to carry his mother and walk naked in front of me and his two daughters till we reached this place.”

Dr. Salwa also called me twice this morning. She was so upset and sad, as a dear friend of hers in Nablus lost his newborn baby. Dr. Ali al Sha‘ar used to work in neonatology at Al-Maqased hospital in Jerusalem, but now works for Save the Children organization in Nablus. His wife, Tahani, 32, is diabetic and she had six miscarriages. They live in an area still under curfew in Nablus. Tahani was 32 weeks pregnant and she was praying all the time to give birth and that when they lift the curfew she hoped to be in the hospital. But her luck was bad. She went into labour prematurely and Dr. Sha‘ar was with Salwa over the phone to help him in getting an ambulance to take his wife to the hospital. Salwa sent him an ambulance twice but it was not allowed to reach his house. Then she put him in contact with Dr. Khamash, a neonatology doctor at Al-Maqased hospital, to be with him in this difficult moment. Dr. Sha‘ar helped his wife to deliver, the baby was born alive at 7 pm, but he needed an incubator. It was impossible to find in the hospital, but Dr. Sha‘ar was just so happy to have a baby after all the long wait. So the couple named the baby Ossaid (little lion). But at midnight, Ossaid developed apnoea and could not breathe anymore. Dr. Sha‘ar tried mouth-to-mouth resuscitation to no avail. The baby died in silence but the father was in a rage. “Sharon killed my son! I saved many lives yet I could not save the life of my own baby!” he said.

I hear the news: “We are the most moral army in the world; to keep our morals intact we risked the lives of our soldiers” says Major Efrat Segev, Public Relations Branch Officer in the Israeli ‘Defence Forces’. “We allowed ambulances to enter Jenin camp, but the Palestinians refused to let them go in; they prefer to pile up the bodies of their dead to use them for their propaganda. We risked the lives of our soldiers because we did not want to harm civilians, we could use F-16s to finish the job in one hour, but we did not.” I was asking myself: “So why then did they use the F-16s to bombard Nablus?” A Norwegian friend told me: “Maybe because they want to ‘finish’ their biblical archaeological search underneath the old city of Nablus, that is why they have to destroy it first.” I feel every day that I am killed twice, one by the atrocities taking place on the ground, and the second by the distortion of these realities. How can they go that far in their lies? How long can they fool the world this way?

Letters from Ramallah, 22 April 2002: The ‘end’ of an occupation

We woke up this morning anxious to see whether the Israeli troops had withdrawn from Ramallah as they claimed they would yesterday or not. Let’s start with my street: there was a new barricade blocking the beginning of the street that was matched by a new one at its end. They said in the news that they

were withdrawing from the whole of Ramallah with the exception of the area of Al-Moqata, or the Presidential Compound. However, even though we are some distance from the Compound, you cannot travel in a straight line: you have to turn to the right and go straight ahead before you reach the besieged area. For me, then, the Israeli “withdrawal” was a joke: they did not withdraw from my street.

I met my neighbour Monji. He was very upset. More than half million US (100,000 \$) worth of his stock had been destroyed. Monji runs a small advertisement company with two partners. The army broke down the door and they simply destroyed or burned what was inside. Every thing was on the ground, half burned or completely destroyed. Three families will have to live on aid for some-time. “I never asked anybody for help: I am a self made man. The idea of going to fill in a form and asking for aid is driving me crazy, but I don’t know what to do. Even if I repair the damage and buy new material, who is going to use our billboard and advertisement material in these conditions?” Monji asked.

I went back to my house. I hesitated to go out. The streets were not that crowded: it seems people don’t want to go to their work places and face the devastating damage in their offices and buildings. Katia, a Dutch woman, came to connect her laptop to my phone line—hers is still damaged since the re-occupation. She showed me a drawing she did and put it on her laptop to illustrate the time the army had ‘visited’ her. “They were rather polite to me when they saw that I was a foreigner but rather manipulative. They tried to convince me that I was in danger and that my neighbours were armed and I might be killed in the crossfire. Then the officer pointed to the house of one of my neighbours and said, “You see this house. There are armed men in there.” “No,” I said, “That is the Dr’s house. I know him.” “O.K. then, this house, this one too.” “That’s Hanan’s house, my friend.” He pointed to at least 6 houses and every time I told him the name of the persons living in that house. I ended the silly discussion by telling him, “I am more afraid of your gun than of my own neighbours.”

We have been ‘visited’ too: not my house but my street. Yesterday they arrested our neighbour Mohammed, who lives across the street from our house. They came in two armoured carriers, pointed their guns at him. They took his computer and tried to seize his car radio but failed to do so. Then they kept hitting the car with iron bars before they left. Then they went in a big crowd to the house of our deceased neighbour Abu Ahmad (he is the father of Ahmad Sa’adat, the general secretary of the Popular Front who is a prisoner right now in the Presidential Compound).³ No one was in the house. The family, after Abu Ahmed’s death, moved to another neighbourhood. But they smashed every thing. They destroyed all the doors and windows. They left nothing intact. I did not understand why.

Later in the day, my husband’s aunt, her husband, and daughter visited us to celebrate our ‘safety.’ We talked a lot about the many stories we heard and saw and we had a lot of politics to talk about. And the bottom line was this: They

have to learn that despite what they did in Jenin, we are not leaving this country. "They will have to demolish all our homes over our heads before they can even dream of making us leave our houses," said Laila, Saleh's aunt. "They seem so heartless. 8 people died in Nablus, from just one family," said Abu Khaled, Saleh's uncle (his aunt's husband), and he continued saying: "The Jordanian government sent two planes full of medical supplies to the Palestinians but they were beyond their expiry date. Don't they see that we have enough misery? The Nativity Church is still besieged, closed to prayer for three weeks now. Maybe if we move it to Afghanistan and put it in the place of the Buddhist Statues then the world will pay more attention to such a very holy place."

People don't know if they are coming or going. Are we occupied or not? No body seems to know. The talk went on and on.

We turned on the news to see more pictures of devastation from the Jenin refugee camp. The army is still preventing anyone from bringing equipment to remove the rubble and preventing humanitarian aid to come into the camp. Three people were pulled out alive after many days under the rubble, dug out with people's bare hands. A woman shouts at the visitors, "Are we a zoo now? Why did you come to visit us now? Why you didn't we prevent what you are seeing now from happening? We don't want your food or your aid. We want our sons and children. We want you to dig out the still dying people under their demolished houses."

A loud speaker announces, "the general commander orders you not to go out of your homes after 6pm till 6am, any 'law' breaker will be punished severely." "What is this?" I asked Saleh. I thought they had withdrawn from Ramallah. He said: "Oh no, they didn't. Our area which extends from the road to the University of Birzeit, Qalandiya and all the northern part of the city is still under invasion." I went out to see who is announcing this 'beautiful' order, but to my surprise I saw a higher barricade sealing our street with dirt and destroyed cars. "We have to remove all this," I said. "Better be wise, don't you know that when the people on Radio Street (300m away from our house) wanted to remove a barricade with a bulldozer, two tanks came quickly, hit the bulldozer and arrested any person passing by. Don't forget that they are still on the top of the Ministry of Culture and all the area around the Presidential compound," Saleh said. Oh, wow, what a withdrawal, we are really liberated now. We should even join Bush and Powell in praising Sharon as 'the' man of peace and prosperity in the face of the 'terrorist' Palestinians.

Ramallah Letters: Day Dreams

Yesterday, Saturday June 29, the curfew was lifted from 9 a.m to 2 p.m, half the shops were closed it seems their owners come from far areas. The renovation work of the Ministry of Public Affairs for the damaged buildings from

the first invasion in March 29 was also freeze, may be they expect more damage in the way. I saw less people in the streets comparing to the first curfew lifting, may be because in the first lifting people were eager to know what happened to their city. When I was walking with my two daughters close to the 'Rukab' the famous ice cream shop, we heard some stunning cries coming out from one of the buildings across the street. The three of us got paralyzed, we immediately thought that the army is inside that building and again some horror stories are taking place. We looked around but did not see people going or coming. We decided to go to Rukab shop and phone the Red Crescent or the Red Cross. Why, asked the shopkeeper? "We heard very loud cries coming out of this building, my daughter said. Oh, yeah, this is because some young youth are watching the World Cup in this café, and Brazil scored a goal against England!"

Few meters down near al Manara, I saw Areej and Wafa'a, surrounded by so many papers hanged on the walls of al Manara buildings. Both represent a new group of young men and women (Nawat). They looked exhausted and they were tirelessly talking to the passing people. "Raise your voice, write your own feelings on these papers, do something, they said." People were watching them with curiosity; it was like an open debate dealing with so many issues in the same time. I hugged them strongly and admired their courage; women always come with new initiatives. Sakher Habash [Fatah political leader who died in 2009] addressed a crowd of women who organized a demonstration in Al-Manara Square to denounce the occupation and urge more people to get out and protest the presence of the Israeli army. "Thanks for you women that you got the men out of their homes," he said. Different speakers including Mustapha Barghouthi, Sakher Habash, others, and myself gave strong speeches. It was the first time in my life to give a public speech, I didn't want but Nahla Qura, the head of our women's coalition (WATC) pushed me. "Yes, we have power, we have the people's power, their tanks will not scare us, and their army cannot do anything against our will. We can defeat their army with our bodies, if thousands, hundred of thousands stop in the way of their tanks, they can do nothing, they will not kill all the people, because they care about their image, their 'morality', let us show the true reality of a whole people against this army and show that that we are not a bunch of 'terrorists' as they always claim," I said. The people were more encouraged than before to go out of their homes to demonstrate, which was a good thing.

[On a less happier note], the high school students are facing a dilemma now due to the invasion of the city. The army invaded the city after the start of the first Tawjihi (high school matriculation) exam. The second day the army shot at the students as they were going to the schools to do the second test. When they lifted the curfew yesterday, they allowed them to pass another exam. Yesterday, some strong rumors spread around of a possible curfew lifting every day from 7 am to 7 pm. But these rumors proved to be false when we got up this morning

on the usual calls of 'It is forbidden to go out or you will be punished.' Yasmine, my youngest daughter said: "Thank God, I finished my 'Tawjihi' exam. I feel their stress and pain, I feel their loss and anger but they should not give up, when they have blood running in their veins they should go on. All the study, all the hard work of yesterday went in jeopardy for the Tawjihi students, they become hostage to their mood." I remembered her last year, working so hard, under tremendous pressure and stress to get good grades, isolating herself from all the shelling and bombardment taking place in the city and only focusing on her study. I felt her words so strongly when she was telling me, poor students.

But Yasmine now has another worry now, as she is supposed to leave the country to study in NY, where she got a wonderful scholarship for university. She is never sure if she will be able to leave the country. "No one is leaving, how I am going to leave, I wish I can fly like a bird," she said. Maher, my eldest son retorted: "At least you have another option opened up for you and not stuck like us," he said. Maher is supposed to graduate this year in Sociology from Bir Zeit University, but since almost two months now he has been unable to reach his university. The Surda checkpoint has been blocking his way, as well more than 5,000 students from all over the West Bank and Gaza, from reaching the university. "Why the hurry to graduate? Once graduated what can you do? There is no work, cannot leave the country for more studies, cannot start your own project, and of course you cannot marry your girl friend," said Sireen, and continued saying: "In all cases, you are luckier than me, I still have another year and this semester to graduate." Sireen is my middle daughter and is on her third year majoring in English literature. "You know what, but don't be shocked, I think I want to get married, what do you think?" Sireen asked. I was really shocked. This very outgoing girl always dreamed of being a famous actress. She already acted in two films with very positive feedbacks. The famous Palestinian director, who first discovered her said she is very talented in acting. Nada Al-Yassir, her second film producer told us the same thing and that she should not waste her talent. But Sireen already had made her decision. She can't act anywhere, not in Egypt because acting school is very expensive and no one gives scholarships for acting school. "Yes, acting is my dream, but it is a very far reality for me, and now; we have to be realistic, marriage is the only realistic option for a girl like me now, at least I will be saved from the daily argument with my dad about waking up early. I don't know why he wants us to wake up early, to do what? I want to feel in control of my life the only thing I can 'decide' and do it is to get married," she said.

"To do many things, you can read, you can work in the garden, you can write. You are only 21 and a whole life is ahead of you, may be you can leave one day to finish your study in acting as you always wished. Do you really want to get married? And who said that you can really 'decide' about that, look around you how many people 'decided' and planned to get married but they could not.

Ahmed went to jail before getting married, two Palestinians were killed in the flat of Youssef's house while it was under construction, so he postponed his wedding. Mahmoud has been engaged since four years and he cannot reach Gaza to get married. Afaf prepared everything for her son's wedding but now we are all under curfew and nobody knows till when. You see even such a decision you are not really in control of it, we are all tired now leave tomorrow for tomorrow and don't give up on your dreams. At least we can dream," I said.

NOTES

1. Data from *Armed Turn* 74, and the Palestinian Cause Seminar.
2. See Herzallah for a critical analysis of this program. A satirical Tumblr page with the name "Uncle Dayton" was anonymously created to "deconstruct Keith Dayton's discourse of re-molding New Palestinian Men."
3. Ahmad Sa'adat became the Secretary General of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine after the assassination of his predecessor, Abu Ali Mustapha, earlier in the Second Intifada in 2000 in an Israeli F-16 shooting. Ahmad Sa'adat and other political leaders who were at risk for their lives took sanctuary in the Presidential Compound. He is currently imprisoned by Israel.

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